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The Weather Whisper

WHAT'S INSIDE?

Day in the Life: The Evening Shift

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The evening shift, or "swing" shift as it is sometimes called, has a staggered time of either 3p-11p or 4p-12a. In addition, there is a third evening shift that is scheduled during the warm season. Why? Typically in Iowa, the afternoon and evening is the most active time for thunderstorms. Any type of convective weather like this requires extra staffing, so we have an extra shift staffed by default during this time of the year bringing the number of staff on the evening shift to three. In the event of more widespread or significant storms, extra staffing is called in on overtime.

Every shift begins with a briefing from the outgoing shift, passing on forecast information and considerations. Due to the timing of data arrival, the evening shift does not do a full overhaul of the seven day forecast. Instead, they focus on the next 24-36 hours with near term updates. As with the day shift, duties are typically split between forecasting duties and data quality control and messaging. The forecaster will make adjustments to the near term forecast and update the aviation forecasts. At the same time, the messaging shift will quality control incoming data and engage with the public and partners on social media and through phone calls.

During quieter weather, the evening shift provides extra time for meteorologists to catch up on seasonal training and work on side projects that are not a part of regular operations.

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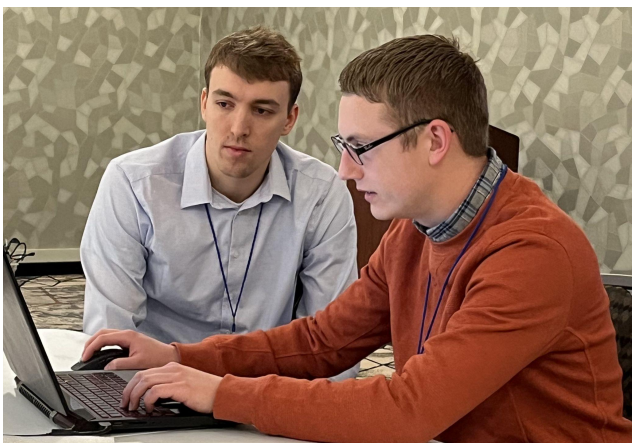
Day in the Life: The Evening Shift - continued from first page

What if there is active weather going on **during** the shift?
This is pretty common during the warm season which is why an extra shift is staffed by default. This isn't always enough, so extra staffing is called in to help. During the most significant, high-end weather events such as the March 5th, 2022 tornadoes, it is common to have 12-15 people at the office working the event.

Operations floor on December 15, 2021 when 63 tornadoes occurred in the state of Iowa. This picture was taken around 2pm, before the worst of the storms. By evening, 3 additional staff were on the operations floor.

Severe Storms Conference

A number of our meteorologists participated in the 25th Annual Severe Storms and Doppler Radar Conference, hosted by the Central Iowa Chapter of the National Weather Association, March 23-25, 2023 in Ankeny, IA. Our staff helped run many aspects of the conference from chairing sessions to hosting a radar workshop and mentoring students as they prepared to give the morning weather briefings. Staff also had opportunities to hear about some of the latest severe weather research in addition to networking with many students and other NWS, broadcast and private sector meteorologists.



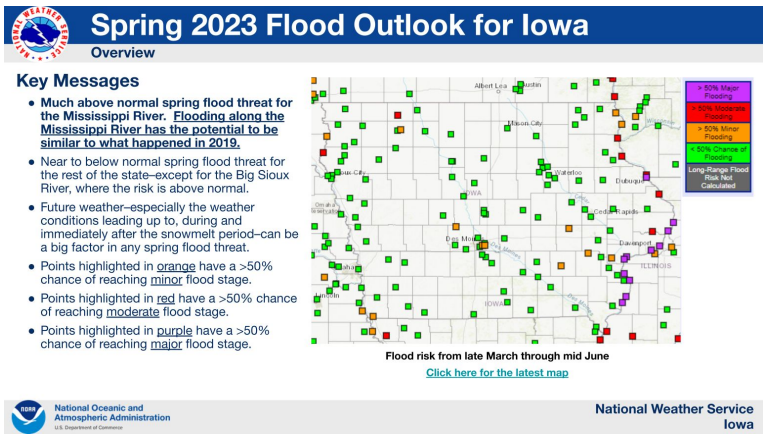
NWS Des Moines Meteorologist Dylan Dodson (left) assisting Iowa State University student Zach M. (right) in preparing the morning weather briefing for conference attendees.

Spring Flood Outlook

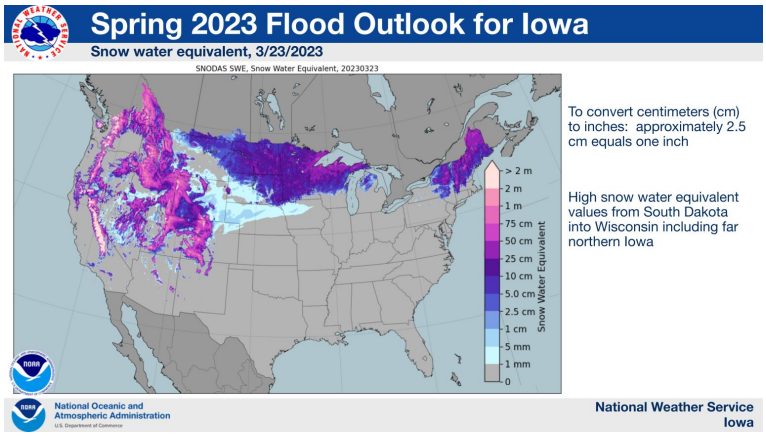
Jeff Zogg, Senior Service Hydrologist

The spring flood outlook for Iowa features a much above normal flood risk for the Mississippi River with the potential to be similar to flooding in 2019. There is a near to below normal spring flood threat for the rest of the state except for the Big Sioux River in far northwest Iowa, where the risk is above normal.

The National Weather Service in Des Moines worked with the other NWS offices serving Iowa this spring to provide multiple briefings to state-level partners and local emergency managers, including on March 24th, briefing Iowa Homeland Security, the Iowa Governor's Office, state partner agencies and local emergency managers across the state. NWS offices in La Crosse, WI and Davenport, IA also participated, given the increased threat of flooding on the Mississippi River.



Key messages slide from the Iowa spring flood outlook.



Map of snow water equivalent of the snowpack.

The briefing discussed the spring flood threat for all rivers in the state and looked at the various elements that affect the spring flood risk. At the left are a couple slides from the briefing.

The largest factor in the increased flood threat for the Mississippi River is the large snowpack from Minnesota into Wisconsin, where the headwaters for the Mississippi River are located. The snow water equivalent of the snowpack–the amount of water in the snow–is over five inches in many places. This amount of snow water equivalent is much higher than normal for this time of year. The future weather–especially up to, during and after the snowmelt–will have a big influence on the spring flood threat.

On the Cover:
The northern lights were visible across Iowa recently! This picture was taken around 1 am on March 24th in Guthrie County by Lead Meteorologist Craig Cogil after arriving home from an evening shift.

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